

MALE ENGAGEMENT IN GENDER EQUALITY

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Mugabi is a short, dark, confident man. We introduced our selves and the reason why we are visiting. He has this knowing look and a smile that makes you comfortable. He is married to Grace Muhindo who is light skinned, medium height and size and very beautiful. They have five children, four girls and one boy. The time we met Mugabi, the wife had gone to the garden and joined us later, in the middle of the conversation. The story of Mugabi and Grace was exciting, mostly told by Mugabi with the wife Grace chipping in later. He had this to say;



Mugabi and his wife Grace

"Before I started working as a monitor, I used to love alcohol. I studied up to senior six but dropped out of school. My wife dropped out in primary four. I used to feel important and boss over my wife. I was the planner in the home and the biggest part of the budget went to drinking. I used to borrow loans and waste the money, yet my wife was working hard to contribute to the money paying back the loans. When I was selected as a community based monitor, I

was trained in several topics including human rights, planning and budgeting and gender issues at household, community and local government level. I felt challenged because I was very inconsiderate to my family and it would be hard to teach others before I change. I shared with my wife and encouraged her to contribute ideas on how to spend money, plan for the home and other issues as necessary. To date we cultivate together and there is tremendous increase in our income. We have fruit trees, improved bananas, ground nuts, red pepper chili, and maize. My wife has been the one planning and looking for new species to plant and she decides where to plant them. The fruit trees she has introduced have been very useful for nutrition and also surplus income. I have realised that she is extremely talented and resourceful as much as she does not have formal education. We now want to construct a new house. Our children are in



The motorcycle that Grace bought

better schools because my wife controls our income better than I used to do. I have learnt that my wife is a better planner than me! Recently we agreed that we buy a motorcycle which will ease our transport needs and also hire it out to bring in more income. I negotiated with someone to sell me a second hand motorcycle. I was going to town and I left the money with my wife to pay for it. When I left, my wife inquired about the cost of a new motorcycle and realized the money was more than enough to buy a new one. She got somebody experienced in motorcycles, went to the border and bought a new motorcycle. When I came home, there was the new motorcycle and a balance of about 300,000! (About \$115) I was challenged and grateful that I now planned with her. We could have lost this money, but here we are with the new motorcycle and the surplus income.” (Mugabi took us later to the center and showed us the motorcycle)

At this point, Grace chips in to agree with what the husband is saying;

“My husband changed a lot when he became a monitor. He gives me space to do what I want and the freedom to do what I think is good for our family. I can sell a goat without his permission and I inform him on how I used the money. This was never the case before! My husband used to take all decisions and I had no say about how our family is run. Many women in this village do not have freedom even to sell a hen. Most families are not

working together and money is a source of conflict. I have also joined a savings group and the money I get helps us as a family. My husband also helps with the children, like now I am harvesting groundnuts which will fetch us some good income, and my husband is remaining home to help with the children so that I can work with my group of women to uproot the ground nuts. I feel lucky because most women do not have the freedom and peace I have. We no longer buy food, we don't struggle to pay school fees like we used to do, even Government has recognized our good work and given us coffee. I am grateful for this programme and wish other men can change too”

At this point I ask Mugabi on the strategies they are using to help other households to develop.



Mugabi now takes care of the children



Food security is assured-Improved bananas brought by Grace

They say that they are using their group meetings, churches and other social gatherings in the village to talk about gender issues. "There is a slight change in the community; we still have a lot of work to do. Men are hard to change, they are brainwashed by culture which makes the man a king, decision maker, planner and everything" says Mugabi. Mugabi adds that domestic violence has reduced in their village as a result of their work and they are now educating the community to stop drinking during working hours because it is a waste of money. A bye law has been formulated to punish the sellers and consumers of alcohol during gardening time. Mugabi says that most households are now cultivating for commercial purpose and hopes their work, if supported will improve household incomes in their community.